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AUTHOR Paulston, Christina Bratt
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ABSTRACT

A number of "do's" and "don'ts" are offered that could be helpful to teachers working with the culturally different. Briefly summarized, the suggestions are: (1) Understand that there is no such thing as a culturally deprived child. (2) Understand that the language or dialect the students speak is as perfect a linguistic system as the teacher's standard English. (3) Understand that different cultures may share the same moral values but express them differently on the surface. (4) Remember that different cultures use different strategies for sanctions and rewards. (5) Be consistent and explicit in your own behavior. (6) Reassess your ways of interacting with the students. (7) Reevaluate kinds of assignments. (8) Demonstrate your respect for the other culture. (9) Be alert to the possibility of contextual constraints in the teaching situation. (10) Don't write off outrageous student behavior as typical of the other culture. (11) Try not to take all the advice given by experts too seriously. (PM)

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Christina Bratt Paulston

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH
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TEACHING THE CULTURALLY DIFFERENT PUPIL

by

Christina Bratt Paulston

Drawings by

John McGurrin
Raub Junior High School

School District of the City of Allentown

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FOREWORD

Beginning with the academic year 1972-73, the Allentown School District has been the recipient of an ESEA Title III grant for "Serving the Culturally Different Pupil." Pursuant to the purposes of the grant, an in-service program on the culturally different pupil was held at Allen High School on December 13, 1972. The principal speaker was Dr. Christina Bratt Paulston of the University of Pittsburgh.

In the course of her address to the professional staff of the district, Dr. Paulston offered a number of "Do's" and "Don'ts" that could be helpful to teachers in working with the culturally different. In this booklet Dr. Paulston expands on her original list and adds an extensive bibliography for readers who wish to delve further into the matter.

BIOGRAPHICAL NOTE

Swedish-born **Christina Bratt Paulston** is currently Associate Professor in the Department of General Linguistics, and Director of the English Language Institute, at the University of Pittsburgh. Dr. Paulston attended elementary and secondary schools in her native country, and earned her A.B. degree at Carleton College. She took her M.A. in English and Comparative Literature at the University of Minnesota, and her Ed.D. in Applied Linguistics at Teachers College, Columbia University.

Dr. Paulston was for five years a high school teacher in Minnesota (English, French, library), and spent two years as a teacher of 8th grade in the American School of Tangier, Morocco. She also taught English, French and Swedish at a gymnasium in Katrineholm, Sweden.

Her TESOL (Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages) experience includes the teaching of modern methods of TESOL to Indian Professors of English at the University of Punjab, Chandigarh, India, as well as teacher training and the preparation of TESOL materials at the Catholic University of Lima, Peru.

A classroom teacher's job is one of the most taxing in the world; not only must he be knowledgable about his subject and prepared for his classes, but the sheer psychic energy which is needed to deal with lively children and adolescents all day long is rarely recognized except by other classroom teachers. The task of the teacher in schools which include among the students children from other cultures is doubly difficult. Furthermore, when those cultures in addition represent minority groups with a long tradition of social and economic exploitation by white middle class Americans, the classroom situation often becomes unbearably difficult. These children often are slow to learn, they don't read at the national expected levels, they are late and don't do their homework, they are quiet and noisy and hostile and so on. Often these allegations are true and when the children don't learn, the teachers are blamed. The teachers become the public scapegoat for all our social ills, for the problems of the schools merely reflect the problems and social injustices of the larger society which are totally beyond the control of an individual classroom teacher. Still, a good teacher can make a tremendous difference in a child's life, and there are pieces of information which will facilitate the teaching of these culturally different children. If, for example, all reading teachers had a knowledge of black phonology, it would be a different ballgame. But until we reach utopia, here are a few considerations for teaching which are designed to increase the probability of survival in the classroom -- both the student's and the teacher's.

DEPRIVED? NO.
DIFFERENT? YES!

1. **Do** understand that there is no such a thing as a culturally deprived child (By culture we mean the consistent value systems and beliefs held by a group or simply that group's unified way of looking at the world). There are culturally different children, yes, but they have a perfectly good culture of their own and in all likelihood one they prefer to mainstream American. Even though the objective of the United States public schools quite legitimately is the socialization of children into mainstream American cultural values -- and remember no one is more for this than the parents -- socialization need not entail the denial of their own culture, so often accompanied by self-hate.

DENIAL OF THEIR OWN CULTURE
IS OFTEN ACCOMPANIED BY SELF-HATE.

2. **Do** understand that the language these children speak -- or dialect, and this is as true of lower class whites as of lower class blacks -- is as perfectly good a linguistic system as the teacher's standard English; it is just different. To deny that *ain't* is a word or to claim that "I ain't got no book" really means that

you have got a book because two negatives make a positive is nonsense only an English teacher could come up with. This doesn't mean that you shouldn't teach standard English, only that you should do so without disparaging the child's own mother tongue. He learned his way of talking at home, after all, and by making clear you don't like it, what you are really telling him is what you think of his family. And he is more perceptive of his family background long before it dawns on you what you are doing. Do be careful of your comments on students' speech; language is an integral part of their sense of self and ego-identity.

3. **Do** recognize that different cultures may share the same moral values but express them differently on the surface. To look someone straight in the eye may signal honesty and aboveboard dealings to a mainstream teacher, but black children have often been carefully taught to avoid direct eye contact in order to show respect. An Indian child will show respect by speaking softly, and the loudness of voice which satisfies his teacher is a clear sign of anger to that child. Few teachers have been exposed to a contrastive cultural etiquette, and you might well take a look at some of the entries in the bibliography, especially Burger and Abrahams-Troike on whose work I have drawn extensively for this paper.

4. **Don't** be a Puritan ethnic with these children. Different cultures use different strategies for sanctions and rewards, and to plug someone into the wrong system just doesn't work. Internalized guilt - the touchstone of the Puritan ethic – just doesn't work in a cultural system where shame is the major controlling sanction. Middle class American children -- black or white -- have internalized a set of sanctions and will self-monitor their behavior, the "you can trust them to be good" sort of thing. Other cultures such as Hispanic, Arab, and ghetto Black control behavior with external sanction: a boy and a girl left alone together are expected to make love from the force of their natural feelings -- therefore they are not left alone; their behavior is monitored, but from without. Shame is external, and appeal to someone's non-existent guilt feelings is just more tuned-off teacher talk. Teachers are so constantly admonished never to use sarcasm in the classroom that they never resort to it except when they are angry and then it is indeed resented by American mainstream children. But in cultures where shame is a controlled sanction, verbal ridicule is a very powerful force. Many a toughie in the classroom, where his very toughness is enhanced by his unflinching attitude to the teacher's scolding, would mind very much to be made to lose face. Sarcasm is not good because it has inherent animosity and a lack of good will, but if you can think of a loving kind of sarcasm, sarcasm with good will, you will find it more efficient for controlling behavior than moral lectures. I suppose we would rather call it teasing or kidding but then we rarely think of teasing as a way of controlling behavior. One of my staff reports the following incident, "On the fourth day of class, two Latin American students were ten minutes late. It was reported by the others that they had gone for coffee. When they came in I commented, 'I hope the coffee was good,' much to the amusement of the others. No one has been late since.

5. **Be** consistent and explicit in your own behavior. Lower class children in our culture as well as Hispanic children tend to come from authoritarian homes and you do them no favor with a permissive attitude. They will take advantage of it, and lose respect for you to boot. A case in point is the sad anecdote of one of my student-teachers in Harlem who reported back in bewilderment that her students' favorite teacher was an ex-WAC who carried and used a riding crop. Of

course the children didn't like to be beaten, but they knew what to expect and they didn't have to play games with her. They respected her for making them obey. Remember, these children are not culturally deprived but they are culturally different. It is very difficult (as well as tiring) to figure out What motivates specific behaviors by people in another culture, which is why it is so important that the teacher be consistent in his behavior and that he clearly outline his particular rules. The particular configuration of values on which these rules are based is not neccessarily shared by all the students, and the teacher should therefore take care to explain it. Most of all, remember that a bleeding heart attitude does these students no good at all and make very sure they are held to the same exacting standards as other students. Teacher expectation of pupil work is crucial in determining the quality of the work the students produce, and it is merely inverted discrimination to expect less and to let them get by with less than acceptable work.

6. **Do** reassess your ways of interacting with the students. It is typical of the cultures we are talking of here, Hispanic, Arab, and ghetto Black, that people tend to relate to persons, not to abstract moral values. There is no way that I can make my Mexican students come on time by appealing to the moral value (which they don't share) of punctuality, but they certainly come on time when I explain that I feel it an insult to my worth as a teacher when they are late and if they want to express their respect for me personally (not as a teacher) they had better come on time. This kind of manipulative strategy is repugnant to many mainstream teachers but it does work since these children have been socialized initially in this manner. You can of course do as one of my staff who spends a great deal of energy on making our Persian students feel guilty, morally guilty, for cheating; she is never going to succeed but it makes her feel good to try.

7. **Do** re-evaluate kinds of assignments. There is in these cultures a certain degree of fatalism, of *mañanaism* and a concordant lack of personal reponsibility. Certainly you try to encourage the growth of such responsibility, but you also recognize that other cultures do not to the degree that we do. Nobody likes to do homework, but when both the physical conditions of the home (such as large families with no possibilities for privacy, etc.) and the cultural attitudes toward unsupervised work

dictate against its being done, then out-of-class assignments become counterproductive. Most students have enough study halls to get their work done, if their work is supervised, so take the trouble to talk to the study hall teachers of students who have difficulties in getting their home work done. Or have them do it in your own class. Or whatever else you can think of. But don't just damn the children for being lazy and let them slide so far behind they will never catch up.

8. **Do** give recognition in class of the value of the other culture. It is not enough just to mouth it, you need to give active demonstration of your respect. A brief language lesson each week where the students are the teachers works very well. Ask one of the regular language teachers to help you set it up. Get parents or adults to come in and discuss their occupations, remember that everybody does not want to become middle class. It is difficult for teachers to understand that a little boy's ambition may well be to become a garbage collector like his father, but the garbage collector has just as hard a time understanding why anyone would want to become a teacher. So there is no need to present only professional occupations; there is a need to present successful (in whatever occupation) role models from minority groups. But you might want to scrounge up a woman doctor or lawyer; professional women are also a minority group. Certainly you can think of many such activities yourself as long as you remember that one of the most important things you can teach the Anglo children is a genuine interest in and respect for other cultures.

9. **Be** alert to the possibility of contextual constraints in the teaching situation. Burger tells the anecdote of a program of pre-natal care for lower class girls in Chile. It was offered in the local school and it was a complete flop. It so happened that in Chile sitting in a classroom was associated with childish status. But social clubs were very much in and desired upper class behavior. So instead the meetings were held in a private home with refreshments served and the program became a huge success.

Peer teaching may be a viable alternative when the teacher cannot get through to the student. Be careful with male-female relationships in pairing students for team work. **Don't** punish children for speaking their own language. But most of all be alert to the fact that another culture may put a very different interpretation on the same phenomenon than you do.

DON'T TRY TO STOP PEOPLE FROM SPEAKING THEIR OWN LANGUAGE.

10. All this doesn't mean that you won't have individual aberrations, but they are difficult to spot in another culture which you are not familiar with. **Don't** just write off outrageous behavior as typical of X culture. You will have to do as the anthropologists do and work with informants from the same culture in order to find out as much as possible about specific sets of behavior which you find disturbing.

11. And Finally, **Do** take with a grain of salt all the good advice experts pour over you. Sincere liking and respect for all of your students is still the *sine qua non* of all good teaching, and all the good advice in the world cannot give you that if you don't have it, and if you have it you can move the earth. Don't underestimate the tremendous importance a teacher can have in individual students' lives.

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